



Getting Started with Research in Ireland

Dan Poffenberger, AG®

British Research Specialist
Family History Library
poffenbergerds@familysearch.org

Introduction

The objective of this course is to teach the basic things you need to know to do Irish research. This begins first with understanding Irish jurisdictions then a review of civil registration, church and census substitute records.

Jurisdictions

To find an ancestor in Ireland you must know the name of the civil parish where they lived. To understand how to find the civil parish, you need to understand the levels of jurisdiction that exist in Ireland, that there are two types of parishes, and gazetteers and maps. This will also help you understand the records you will be searching.

Understanding Levels of Jurisdiction

- Ireland was one country until 1922 – then divided into the Republic of Ireland (southern) and Northern Ireland - Antrim, Down, Armagh, Fermanagh, Tyrone, and Derry [Londonderry]
- Large cities – may contain several parishes
- Civil Registration districts = Poor Law Unions
- Organized from smallest to largest: townland/town, civil parish, barony, county, country

Understanding Parishes

There are two types of parishes in Ireland: civil and ecclesiastical

- Civil parishes – typically share same names and boundaries as ecclesiastical parishes of Church of Ireland (Anglican Church) – had own diocese
- Parishes of Roman Catholic church - only ecclesiastical, often have different names and boundaries than civil parishes in the area and more than one name – had own diocese

Tools for Finding Place Names: Gazetteers/Maps

- Civil and Catholic parish maps can be found online at www.johngrenham.com. Click on “Browse” then “Maps” in the column on the left. This website is free in the FamilySearch Library and FamilySearch Centers.
- General Alphabetical Index to the Townlands and Towns of Ireland – www.thecore.com/seanruad. This website also has flexible search abilities to help with spellings.
- Townlands.ie (www.townlands.ie) has townland maps and good browsing tools by county and parish.
- Logainm.ie (www.logainm.ie) also has townland maps and even pronunciations of civil parishes in Irish Gaelic and English.
- Lewis' Topographical Dictionary of Ireland – www.libraryireland.com/topog.

- Genuki is an excellent reference tool for the Great Britain and Ireland – www.genuki.org.uk. Click “Ireland” then “Maps”.

Civil Registration

Civil registration is the government registration of births, marriages and deaths. These events were registered in registration districts that typically followed poor law union boundaries.

- April 1, 1845 -- Registration of non-Catholic marriages began
- January 1, 1864 -- Civil Registration of all births and deaths and Catholic marriages began

Information on Irish Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates

Birth: Birth date and birth place, Child’s name and sex, Father’s name, occupation and location, Mother’s name including maiden name, Informant information, Registrar’s name.

Marriage: Bride’s and groom’s names and their ages, Marital condition, occupations and residences, Date and place of marriage (religion), Names and occupations of both fathers, Signatures/marks of bride and groom, Two witnesses.

Death: Name and sex of deceased, Age and occupation of deceased, Date, place and cause of death, Name, description and residence of informant.

Locating the records

- www.irishgenealogy.ie – Index and images to births (1864 to 1922), index to marriages (1845 to 1947) and images (1870-1941) and index to deaths (1864-1972) and images (1871 to 1972). These are for all of Ireland until 1922 and the Republic of Ireland from 1922.
- www.familysearch.org - Indexes for 1845-1958. Also, deaths from 1864-1870 on microfilm at the FamilySearch Library only.
- www.rootsireland.ie – subscription website - indexes and transcriptions.
- All registers available in Ireland - Office of Registrar General for Republic, www.groireland.ie; General Register Office for Northern Ireland, www.groni.gov.uk.

Things to Remember

- The name of the townland is typically included in civil registration records
- Never trust the birth date. As many as one third of parents “adjusted” the birth day to avoid paying a late registration fee. NOTE: Baptism dates may pre-date the birth date!
- “Mac,” “Mc” and “O” may be dropped off surname. Search with/without and try interchanging them
- Estimated that about 15% of events, particularly births, were not registered in early years

Church Records

Roman Catholic

Except for the province of Ulster, about 90% belonged to the Roman Catholic church. Their records were not lost in the 1922 fire. More were lost through careless record keepers or were not kept at all. On average, Catholic parish registers begin in 1827 and they may be in Latin.

Information in primary Irish Roman Catholic records

Baptisms: Child’s name, father’s name, mother’s maiden name, sponsors (godparents) date of baptism (usually baptized as soon as possible after birth)

Marriages: Name of groom, name of bride, witnesses (often related to bride/groom) date of marriage

Burials: Registers kept by only about 20% of parishes until 1880. Typically only give - Name of deceased and date of burial. Look for Tombstone, Monumental Inscriptions or possible obituary notices for death info.

Locating Roman Catholic records

- National Library of Ireland (www.nli.ie) – holds virtually all RC parish registers pre-1880. These have all been digitized and are available for free.
- John Grenham (www.johngrenham.com) also as Roman Catholic parish maps and links to the NLI digitized parish registers.
- Ancestry.com and FindMyPast.com have indexes to those digitized records. Be careful about trusting the indexes.
- Heritage Centres have indexed many RC records and used www.rootsireland.ie (subscription) to computerize their indexes and may be better than Ancestry's or FindMyPast's. Their transcriptions go to at least 1899.

Church of Ireland

The Church of Ireland is Anglican and was the established church from 1536 to 1871. About 12% of Irish belonged to it. Many of their records were destroyed in the Four Courts fire in 1922. Destroyed record percentages by province are: Connaught 61%, Leinster 50%, Munster 61%, Ulster 37%. Search Church of Ireland records even if your ancestor was Roman Catholic because it was the legally recognized church and many Catholics are baptized, married, and buried there.

Information in Church of Ireland registers

Baptisms: Child's name, father's name, mother's name (but not maiden), date of baptism, (from 1820s onwards) date of birth, occupation of father, and "abode"

Marriages: Names of groom and bride, marriage date, and from 1820s onwards - addresses of parties, names, and addresses of witnesses

Burials: Name of deceased, date of burial

Locating Church of Ireland records

Very few were microfilmed by FamilySearch but check for your parish of interest:

- Representative Church Body Library (www.ireland.anglican.org/library) - has originals and links to those who will research for a fee
- A list of surviving records can be found at: <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/7250/church-of-ireland-parish-record>
- PRONI (www.proni.gov.uk) - holds many copies for Northern Ireland
- Many are still held locally in the parish church.

Presbyterian

The Presbyterian Church became prominent in the province of Ulster when Scottish Presbyterians began migrating there in 1605. The earliest registers date to the 1690's but the average start date is 1819. Presbyterian records were not destroyed in the 1922 fire. Virtually all Presbyterians lived in six counties in Northern Ireland (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone).

Information in Presbyterian Church registers

The information kept in the records is similar to what was kept in Church of Ireland records. However, like the Catholics, few burial records were kept, check the local Church of Ireland burial grounds.

Locating Presbyterian Church records

Roman Catholic Records

County	RC Start
Donegal	1856
Mayo	1849
Fermanagh	1848
Antrim	1847
Tyrone	1846
Sligo	1845
Londonderry	1844
Monaghan	1844
Leitrim	1843
Clare	1840
Down	1838
Roscommon	1836
Galway	1835
Cavan	1832
Armagh	1831
Longford	1829
Kerry	1828
Offaly	1827
Limerick	1823
Cork	1818
Wexford	1816
Kilkenny	1815
Laois	1815
Tipperary	1814
Kildare	1813
Wicklow	1813
Westmeath	1809
Meath	1808
Waterford	1807
Louth	1805
Carlow	1803
Dublin	1801

- FamilySearch has few copies or transcripts on microfilm or digitized. Check the FamilySearch Catalog using a keyword search and the name of the congregation.
- The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland (www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com) has congregational histories and records. Click on "Collections" to begin your search.
- The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland aka PRONI also has an extensive collection and guide (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/guide-church-records>). Click on "PRONI Guide to Church Records".
- The Ulster Historical Foundation is a website (www.ancestryireland.com) with a few free records and about 1.8 million pay-per-records, including tombstone inscriptions.
- Often contain notices of intention to marry, some baptism/marriage entries, information about migration (Certificates of Transference if they survive).

Census Records

A statistical count of the population of the country, the census records are one of best ways to locate ancestors at a given place and time except in Ireland.

- Only 1901 and 1911 survive in their entirety. Both are online at www.nationalarchives.ie (indexes and images) as well as the census fragments listed below. These censuses can still be helpful for earlier research because of the older population found in them.
- There are some census fragments available for the 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 Censuses. The rest were destroyed in the Four Courts fire. Make sure an ancestor in a census fragment is in the exact right place at the right time.
- The 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891 Censuses were destroyed by government order.

Census Substitutes

Griffith's Valuation

Because of the destruction of census records, the Griffith's Valuation tax record is critical to Irish family history research. The tax was assessed from 1848 to 1864 beginning with the counties in the south and finishing in the north.

Information in Griffith's Valuation

Contains heads of households only - both those who leased land and those who owned land. It is estimated to contain 80-90% of all heads of households. This can also be used to determine the names of estate holders who may have estate records with land lease information.

Locating Griffith's Valuation Records

- The Irish Ancestors website (www.johngrenham.com) uses Griffith's Valuation to plot surname distribution.
- AskAboutIreland.ie (www.askaboutireland.ie) is a favorite place to search. It has a complete index, images of published valuation pages and maps to make it possible to find the exact land an ancestor farmed.
- RootsIreland has an excellent index, and this database is free on the website.
- Also check Valuation Lists (also known as Cancel Books, Revision Books) – 1850's to 20th century; lists of occupiers kept subsequent to Primary Valuation. These allow you to trace a tenement held from generation to generation. The earlier Field Books, Tenure Books, House Books and Quarto Books may also be valuable. Check the FamilySearch Wiki for "Ireland Taxation" for more information.
- John Grenham (www.johngrenham.com) has a county-by-county listing of census substitutes.

Tithe Applotment

- Similar to Griffith's Valuation, the tithe was a land-based tax exacted from rural Ireland between 1823 and 1837. The tax did not apply to inhabitants of the cities or larger towns. Though taken from people of all faiths, the tithe was used to support the Church of Ireland in rural areas. Tithe Applotment books record the name of the head of the household and the value of the property. Approximately 40% of heads of household are represented.
- The Irish National Archives (www.nationalarchives.ie) and FamilySearch have indexes and images.

More information about all that has been discussed can be found at the FamilySearch Wiki (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page).